

GALATIANS 4:4
by Willis E. Bishop

(A Christmas study for December 1999)

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem [or set free] those under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

We shall look at the different aspects of that verse: the fullness of time; His Son; born of a woman; born under the law; that He might redeem them; that we might receive the adoption. It might not be in that order, but we shall look at all six.

Observation No. 1

"When the fullness of the time had come." Christ was born into human history at the time decided by the Father. We are not told how the Father decided this, but Scripture tells us that He sent the Son. Perhaps in the future, when we get to Glory, we'll be given an insight into a part of that eternal council of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit before they began creation.

I have listed some suggestions made by Bible scholars concerning the time. For example, the widespread use of the Greek language throughout the civilized world. About three hundred years before, Alexander the Great conquered practically the then-known world and the Greek language became known to the people. The Old Testament had been translated into Greek. The New Testament was to be written in Greek. Therefore, the language made it a good time for our Lord to come.

Some suggest the widespread presence of the Greek Jewish synagogues as a factor in the fullness of time. That was due of course to the dispersion of the Jews in practically every nation, as we read in Acts chapter 2. The Jews took with them monotheism, as opposed to pantheism and the many gods of the nations, and also a hope of the Messiah.

Then the excellent Roman roads - "All roads lead to Rome." We in our day would not consider them excellent, but travel on them was better than without any roads. And there was communication because of the Roman road system.

The times of Roman peace. About ten years before the birth of Christ the temple of Janus, the Roman god of war, was closed and remained closed until about thirty years after the birth of Christ. In that sense it was a time of peace, which facilitated the spreading of the Word of God.

At any rate, God sent forth His Son in the fullness of time.

Turn to Daniel chapter 9, which bears on the Christmas story, beginning with verse 25: "Know and understand that from the going forth

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of the word to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince shall be seven sevens of years and sixty-two sevens of years" [giving the interpretation of that]. "Build Jerusalem" - not the temple but the city. Nehemiah chapter 2 provides a time when the decree was given to rebuild Jerusalem.

Beginning at that point, figuring forward sixty-nine weeks of seven years each, we come to the time of Christ. Those who knew anything about Daniel 9 (and the priests and Levites did know) could anticipate that they were living in the time when the Messiah would come. There is no excuse for not believing that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah, because the time element is very clear in Daniel 9:25.

I Corinthians 10:11: "Now all these things happened to them...." that is, to Israel. Paul lists there the crossing of the Red Sea, the water from the rock, the sexual immorality, the idol worship, the complaining, all of which brought God's judgment upon them, and Paul was using that to warn them. "...these things happened to them as examples and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends [or final stages] of the ages have come."

Paul was pointing out that Christ came in the ends or the final stages of the ages, the fullness of time.

Observation No. 2

Jesus was the Son of God before He was sent into the world. Galatians 4:4: "He sent forth His Son."

People do not understand when we speak about the Father and the Son. We do not know any son who is as old as his father. But we must let Scripture interpret itself. When the Father and the Son are used of the Trinity, the meaning is of course different than we have in our ordinary language. There are passages of Scripture to verify that the Son was so called before He came into the world.

There was a very well-known Bible teacher who insisted that Christ was not the Son until He came into the world. But I believe that teacher has changed his mind on that. Christ was a Son when He was sent. John 1:1 states that He was also deity.

A side note: The Father sent the Son (Gal. 4:4); the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). One of the larger denominations is divided on this, and the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit was the subject of much debate during the Middle Ages. But the Scripture is quite clear on this.

Observation No. 3

The Son was sent to perform a definite task - "that He might redeem [or set free] those under the law" (Gal. 4:4).

Galatians 3:13: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." That is very familiar. We know of a sinless Christ who died for us.

Observation No. 4

For the task of redemption the Son took upon Himself human form and sinless human nature. Turn to Luke 1, looking at the part dealing with the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, beginning with verse 26.

I will begin reading at verse 29: "And when she saw Gabriel she was perplexed at his word and considered what manner of greeting this was. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth [or bear] a Son and shall call His name Jesus. For He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.'

"Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also the holy one' And I stop right there.

Your translation may read, "the holy thing." That word in the Greek is either the masculine or the neuter, and I like it better in the masculine. That holy one who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

The sinless human nature of the Lord Jesus was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit at the time of the conception. "That holy one." Our Lord was indeed sinless from the time of His conception and birth.

Then John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Let me point out a part of the person of Christ. He had a human body - Hebrews 10:5. When the Lord left Heaven, He said to the Father, "A body have You prepared for Me." He had a human soul - Mark 14:34: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful" - His statement in the Garden of Gethsemane. And then, in Luke 23:46, He had a human spirit. On the cross He said, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit."

He had a human body, a human soul, and a human spirit. But He had one more thing: deity. You and I are three-part beings (I Thessalonians 5:23). But Christ was a four-part being: human body, human soul, human spirit, and deity.

Paul said in Colossians 2, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." That union of the human and the divine is called in theological language "the hypostatic union."

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I ran across an interesting and lovely statement concerning Christ in this regard - If You Have The Incomparable Christ, by J. Oswald Sander, on page 89:

Chrysostom has a striking paragraph: I do not think of Christ as God alone, or man alone, but both together. For I know He was hungry, and I know that with five loaves He fed five thousand. I know He was thirsty, and I know that He turned water into wine. I know that He was carried in a ship, and I know that He walked on the sea. I know that He died, and I know that He raised the dead. I know He was set before Pilate, and I know that He sits with the Father on His throne. I know that He was worshiped by angels, and I know that He was stoned by the Jews. And truly some of these I ascribe to the human and others to the divine nature. For the reason of this he is said to have been born both God and man.

I repeat - for the task of redemption the Son took upon Himself human form and sinless human nature. He was born in the same way you and I are, but He was conceived in an entirely different way.

In the Old Testament He appeared as a theophany. In the New Testament He appears as man. And so we have this interesting union of the divine and the human in the one person.

In Galatians 4:4: "born of a woman." The virgin birth is a central truth of Scripture, but this verse does not present that fact. "Born of a woman" does not present the truth of the virgin birth. This is shown by the way that phrase is used in other places in Scripture.

In Job 14:1, Job says, "Man who is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble." Bildad, speaking in Job 25:4, asked, "How can a man be pure who is born of a woman?" Jesus, in Matthew 11:11, said, "Assuredly I say to you, 'Among those born of woman there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.'" And every one of us except Adam and Eve has been born in that manner - born of woman.

An unreliable tradition says that Joseph and Mary willingly submitted themselves to the law of Numbers 5:11 and following. The passage is real, but the question is whether Joseph and Mary found it necessary to submit to that trial.

Turn to Numbers 5:11: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, "If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him and a man lies with her carnally and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself and there was no witness against her nor was she caught, if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife who has defiled herself, or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife although she has not defiled herself, then the man shall bring

his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley [about two quarts], and he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering for bringing iniquity to remembrance.

"And the priest shall bring her near and stand her before the Lord, and the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel [probably from the laver], and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle [remember, the tabernacle had no floor except the ground] and put it into the water. Then the priest shall stand the woman before the Lord, uncover the woman's head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings the curse.

"And the priest shall put her under oath and shall say to the woman, 'If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you'--then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse and he shall say to the woman, 'The Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people when the Lord makes your loins fall and your belly to swell, and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach make your belly swell and your loins to fall.' Then the woman shall say, 'Amen. So be it.'" [Or, as repeated in the original, "Amen, amen" - she agrees to that.]

Verse 23: "Then the priest shall write these curses in a scroll, and shall scrape them off into the water [that is, the ink by which that was written shall be scraped off into the water], and he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings a curse shall enter into her to become bitter.

"And the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the Lord and bring it to the altar. And the priest shall take a handful of the offering as its memorial portion, burn it on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water. When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself, behaved unfaithfully towards her husband, that the water will bring a curse and will enter her and become bitter, and her belly will swell and her loins will fall, and the woman will become a curse among her people. But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

"This is the law of jealousy which a wife, while under the husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself. And when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man and he becomes jealous of his wife, then he shall stand the woman before the Lord and the priest shall execute

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all this law upon her. And the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt."

Tradition says that willingly Joseph and Mary, because they both believed the Lord, underwent this particular test. In the eyes of the community that cleared what otherwise would have been guilt on the part of Mary.

Q. Whose is this unreliable tradition - the Christians or the Jews?

A. It was a tradition in the early Church concerning, not the Jews, but the Christian Church. The intent was to clear Mary of any iniquity. It is not reliable tradition, but it would not surprise me that they might have willingly undergone that.

Q. What if she refuses it?

A. Then she is considered as being guilty and she would be stoned. In Deuteronomy chapter 4 there would be an answer to your question. If she refuses it would be rather evident that she was guilty.

Q. Was there a similar test for men? [Asked by a man.]

A. I expected someone would ask that.

Turn to Deuteronomy 22:22: "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die, the man that lay with the woman and the woman. So shall you put away evil from Israel. [There is the responsibility of the man.] If a young woman [verse 23] who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death with stones. The young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

"But if a man finds the betrothed young woman in the countryside and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die." So there was a responsibility on the part of men as well as on the part of women. The Lord expects both men and women to live purely in this regard.

Q. This took place even though the woman was betrothed and not married?

A. Yes, in verse 23 the word is "betrothed" to a husband. That is the period of time between engagement and actual marriage. It is that period of time in which Mary and Joseph would have supposedly submitted to this test.

This tradition says that both Mary and Joseph willingly submitted to

this in order to clear Mary from any possible guilt. That worked in any case because - look at Deuteronomy 23:2: "One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly." Now notice - if the people had believed that Jesus was illegitimate, then He never would have been permitted into the synagogues and to teach. A number of times we read that He entered into the synagogue and taught.

You are familiar with Luke 4, the story in Nazareth where He enters the synagogue and they give Him the book and He stands up to read and stops in the middle of the verse, sits down and says, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." He was permitted to read in the synagogue and they threw Him out, not because they considered Him illegitimate, but because He claimed to be a fulfillment of that part of the verse of Scripture. I don't find any place in Scripture where he was considered to be illegitimate.

Q. How about the time the Jews said, "We be not born of fornication"?

A. Turn to John 8:3 - notice in part to whom Jesus is speaking: "Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery." Note the scribes and Pharisees. Now go to verse 31: "Then Jesus said to the Jews who believed Him, 'If you remain in My word you are truly My disciples. And you shall know the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's seed and we have never been in bondage to anyone [which of course was not true]. How can you say, 'You will become free'?' Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin, and a slave does not remain in the house forever, but the Son remains forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free you shall be really free. I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father and you do what you have seen with your father.'" [Who is "your father"?)

Look in verse 44: "You are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you desire to do." Jesus is saying, "You are not really a spiritual descendant of Abraham. You are of your father, the devil." Then they answered Him to say, in verse 41, "We are not born of fornication, for we have one Father, even God."

The point of the context is that Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees are not speaking about Christ or His birth. They are talking about Him and His relationship to God, and about them and their relationship to their father. When He says to the Jews, "You are of your father, the devil," they answer, "We are not born of fornication. We are Abraham's seed." In light of that context, I suggest that they are not referring to Jesus and His birth at all.

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Remember, Jesus was permitted in the synagogues and He taught. According to Deuteronomy 23:2, He would not have been permitted to do so if He were considered illegitimate. In John 8, He answered the Jews in connection with the context of their allegiance to Satan and not to God.

Observation No. 5

For the task of redemption, it was necessary that Jesus should meet the demands of the law perfectly in order to redeem those who were under the condemnation of the law. That is part of our Galatians 4:4 passage.

Notice, His deity - necessary to give His sacrifice infinite value. His humanity - necessary because it was man who sinned and man who must bear the penalty. His sinlessness - necessary to pay the debt of the sinner. Perfect God became perfect man, and in His death He was a perfect sacrifice for all of our sins.

On the aside - you are familiar with the fact that everyone of us has been born of a father and a mother. And you and I have never existed before. Here is Christ, who had existed before. If He had been born of Joseph and Mary, that could not have been true. God used a miraculous conception and the virgin birth to circumvent the natural law.

- Q. I heard a question on the radio last night: Why is it that the sin nature of Mary would not have been passed on to Jesus?
- A. That was the work of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 1:35: "Therefore, that holy thing [or holy one] which is born of you shall be called the Son of God." The sin nature of Mary could not have been passed on to Jesus because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting that in the genealogy in Matthew 1 Joseph is a descendant of David through Jechoniah upon whom there was a curse that none of his descendants would sit on Israel's throne. Therefore, through the virgin birth Joseph had no physical relationship with Jesus. In Luke 3 is the genealogy of Mary, who descended from David through his son Nathan.

Continuing the point of Christ being born under the law. Turn to Luke 2:21 - we want to notice several phases of His being born under the law: "And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, His name was called Jesus, the one given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Genesis 17:12 deals with God's instruction to Abraham: "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised." That became a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. Then in Leviticus 12:3: "In the eighth day he shall be circumcised." That was the Lord's instruction to Moses for the nation of Israel.

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So Jesus' name and circumcision would be put into the temple records. I rather believe that when Matthew traced Jesus' genealogy through Joseph he got the information from the temple records. That is also true of Luke, tracing Mary's genealogy.

The circumcision could be done at home. While they were still in Bethlehem, on the eighth day our Lord, under the law, was circumcised.

In Luke 2:22 we read, "Now when the days of her [that is, Mary's] purification, according to the law of Moses, was completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord." The purification of Mary according to the law.

Turn to Leviticus 12:1: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel saying, "If a woman has conceived seed and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her periodic impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. [Thirty-three plus seven equals forty.] She shall not touch any hallowed thing or go into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

"But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks as in her impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of her impurity sixty-six days. [That is eighty total.] And when the days of her purification are fulfilled for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall bring it before the Lord and make atonement for her, and she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female.

"And if she is not able to acquire a lamb, then she may take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one as a burnt offering and the other as sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.""

That was the law, and Mary was operating under the law in connection with the birth of Christ.

In Luke 2 verse 24 we find that Mary offered, according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Notice, she did not offer the lamb, and we have a proper conclusion that apparently they could not afford the lamb.

Comment: That is further proof that the wisemen did not arrive when Christ was born.

The circumcision could be done in Bethlehem, but the purification needed to be done in Jerusalem.

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In verse 22 of Luke 2, the last part of the verse, it says: "And they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord."

Not only was Christ circumcised, He was also presented to the Lord.

Let me remind you of a part of Israel's history. Exodus 13 verse 2 comes from the account of the first passover in Egypt when God had spared the firstborn of Israel's sons because of the blood sprinkled on the doorposts. Later on God says, "That firstborn belongs to Me." Then in Numbers 3 the Lord says, "Instead of the firstborn I will take the Levites." The difference between the Levites and the firstborn constituted a redemption fee which was to be paid. You can look up Numbers 3:47 and 18:16, where there was a five-shekel redemption fee paid for those firstborn.

Apparently when Jesus was taken to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord they paid that redemption fee of five shekels. That redemption fee was still paid in the time of our Lord.

Then in Matthew 5:17, our Lord said, "Do not think I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

To summarize: Jesus was born under the law, lived under the law and kept it perfectly. He died under the penalty of the law which we had broken, and so paid our penalty.

I have thought of a song which is not in many hymnals, and I will read those stanzas, remembering that Christ died under the law to set us free from the law. The wife of P. B. Bliss gave him a book as a birthday present and Mr. Bliss read the blessed fact of believers' deliverance from the penalty of the law by the death of Christ on the cross. Realizing this, he thought every believer should know about it, and he wrote this song:

Free from the law, O happy condition;
Jesus has bled, and there is remission.
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall;
Grace has redeemed us once for all.

Now we are free, there's no condemnation;
Jesus provided a perfect salvation.
"Come unto Me," O hear His sweet call;
Come, and He saves us once for all.

Children of God, O glorious calling;
Surely His grace will keep us from falling.
Passing from death to life at His call;
Blessed salvation once for all.

And then the chorus:

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Once for all, O sinner receive it;
Once for all, O brother believe it.
Cling to the cross - the burden will fall.
Christ has redeemed us once for all.

At this point we ought to remember that this is the reason for the season, as someone has said. You and I were lost in sin, condemned, undone; we could do nothing to earn salvation; could not pay for it in any sense at all. Then Christ, as a perfect sacrifice, stretched out His arms and said, "It is finished." Now all that is necessary is to say, "Lord, I receive; Lord, I believe," and we are born again. How about you?

Observation No. 6

"We may now receive the adoption of sons" - the last part of Galatians 4:4. The background of that is that in Galatia the father, by his will, set a time when his infant heir entered into the full privileges of the family. That could be at ten years or another time the father deemed him capable of the privileges.

But the Lord, at the moment a person exercises saving faith, adopts that believer into the position of privilege in the family of God. We adopt someone who is not our son [or daughter]. God adopts only those who are His children. And that adoption takes place the moment we believe. There are a lot of things that happen when we believe that we are not aware of. They are revealed in Scripture, and you and I as believers have been adopted into the family of God with its full privileges.

This privilege should have a practical effect in our lives as adopted sons. Spiritual growth should result in the enjoyment of those privileges, but full realization awaits the redemption of our bodies. That is what Paul referred to in Romans 8:23: "We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

We are still in the Christmas season, and I want to read a story which I have not seen any place else.

None of us sailors in the 119th Construction Battalion were in the mood for Christmas. No wonder. Two hundred of us had been stuck for months, right in the steamy middle of the tropical jungle, installing fuel tanks that were supposed to figure somehow in the last stages of this war with the Japanese. It was so hot we pitched our tents on platforms and slept in hammocks to catch any passing breath of air. The lonesome, muggy, homesick days were far removed from the traditional Christmas we remembered. We didn't even have a chaplain on hand to help us celebrate.

In fact, the only regular visitors we saw were jungle tribesmen who haunted the fringes of our camp. Dressed only in

loincloths, the small, bronze-skinned men would suddenly materialize in the undergrowth, staring at us from the mot-tled shadows of the New Guinea rain forest. Vanishing as noiseless as they appeared, short and stocky, with flat faces and kinky hair, they were said to have been ferocious warriors before the coming of the missionaries. Even now, the sight of them made us uneasy. Certainly, that was our reaction on that unforgettable Christmas Eve of 1944.

Shortly before dusk that day there they were again, peering from the forest edge. We were standing around the mess tent in our fatigues, not doing much, not saying much, just hanging around, sweating and brushing away the insects, and trying not to think about what the day was, when suddenly, from all around the clearing they began to advance, scores of scowling, nearly naked tribesmen. Never before had they ventured beyond the cover of the jungle, and instinctively we seabees moved closer together. There was nothing to fear from those solemn-faced, unarmed men. But we couldn't talk to them and we didn't know what they wanted.

The natives began to circle us, then they stopped and stood still. The forest itself began to be very, very quiet, as if every jungle were on alert. Then, incredibly, the little men began to sing, strange, harsh-sounding words in their native tongue. But the tune was unmistakable: "O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie."

Blinking back the sudden moisture in my eyes, I mentally supplied the familiar English lyrics. When the former warriors finished, they launched into more songs in their deep, guttural voices. For half an hour they sang us the songs of home, carols, and they must have learned from some unknown missionary this, in the brush.

That night, after our guests slipped back into the rain-forest, I lay in my hammock sweating, uncomfortable as ever, but no longer quite so melancholy. Through their music, and through their caring, these strange strangers had made us feel the familiarity and warmth of home.

Prayer: Our Father, we thank You for the Christmas story and for its fragrance which should linger with us even throughout the year. Christ came, not just to be a child, but to be a Savior. We pray that You would search our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Do we really know Him, His truth, and the forgiveness that He offers, His freedom from the law, and His everlasting life. Grant this, O Lord, to us all. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.